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**Kentucky Department for Libraries & Archives**  
*An agency of the Education, Arts & Humanities Cabinet*

April 18, 1996

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Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
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Washington, DC 20554

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The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA) has long accepted the responsibility for promoting and supporting networking and resource sharing activities among Kentucky libraries of all types, with the goal of providing improved access to information and materials located beyond the local institution. Access and delivery of this service is highly dependent on the use of telecommunications in its various forms.

The Department's program which delivers network and resource sharing services is the Kentucky Library Network (KLN), in which 283 libraries (126 public, 52 academic, 50 school and 55 special) participate. Current programs include a basic level of service which is available to all member libraries. These services are OCLC Group Access for interlibrary loan service, Kentucky Union List of Serials via OCLC Serials Union Listing service, Bulletin board/e-mail service via Technology Access Network of Kentucky (TANK) a Federal program housed at the University of Kentucky, KLN SharePac CD-ROM product for union catalog, and computer technical support for the membership via the Kentucky Department For Information Systems.

In February 1996, KLN also initiated an OCLC FirstSearch Pilot Project. Thirty-one project sites were selected from applications received from KLN member libraries. The goals of this project are 1) to demonstrate the feasibility of a proposed expansion of current basic KLN service to include access to designated information databases and 2) to gather concrete data on activity levels in an environment in which both staff and patrons have access to the KLN Group Database and selected information databases.

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Telecommunication costs involved with the above FirstSearch Pilot Project are leasing fees of ports at OCLC and connect-hour charges for Selective User participants, local leased line and Internet access costs. In addition any additional telecommunications costs at a local library, e.g., and additional telephone line for a public access terminal, is the responsibility of the local library. Since many of our local libraries can barely afford a single business voice line (average cost \$40 per month), they could not participate in this Pilot Project.

To date, most of Kentucky libraries have made the OCLC connection via dedicated leased lines or dial access, the later being supported fiscally by KDLA. These charges average \$21,000 per year currently and are expected to go up as the SharePac product becomes obsolete. Without this telecommunications cost support, many of KLN's members could not participate in any of the information access or resource sharing activities. Thus the telecommunications costs related to any KLN service is a significant factor in delivering service to the citizens of Kentucky.

Since the State and Federal budget situation is unclear and none too promising, the Kentucky library community is cooperating to strategically plan for the future of information technology (which is now and will be ever increasing vital to all our citizens). Partnerships have been formed to seek creative ways to expand and further the FirstSearch Project and other information resource initiatives. However, telecommunications costs are a key factor in any effort to utilize, expand or create information services.

There are numerous challenges facing the Network. One of the most difficult is to provide equitable access to information for our citizens. The goal of equitable public access to diverse sources of information and viewpoints has long been a tenet of libraries and KLN. This goal will be more and more difficult in the "information environment" of the very near future.

Equity means widespread access to information. Today this cannot be done without telecommunications costs that someone must pay for. In Kentucky, 163,206 (16%) of all families, 68% of female householder families with children under 5 years of age are under the poverty line and an estimated 5% of households have a computer with a modem. In this age of worldwide computer networks, 10% of all Kentucky households have no telephone. In some Eastern Kentucky counties, it's closer to one in three households without a telephone. Kentucky has the fifth-highest phoneless rate in the nation according to the 1990 U.S. Census. It should be obvious that libraries can be the equitable, open access point to insure that Kentuckians have access to the information resources they need for their health, economic, educational, business and personal needs.

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The local budgets of libraries simply have not kept pace with the growth of the cost of access to information resources. Public libraries realized a 12% growth in the size of their collections from 1981 to 1992, but a growth of 244% in the materials budgets of libraries was needed to achieve that growth. A journal subscription which cost \$39 in 1976 may cost \$200 today. The financial situation for most libraries in Kentucky is not very promising.

If Universal Service under the 1996 Telecommunications Act means ensuring that the basic tool of electronic communication is available to everyone there is NO BETTER WAY to provide it than through our libraries. Libraries have traditionally provided cost-effective information service to our citizens. Relief in telecommunications costs would go a long way toward continuing our ability to provide this needed and valued service.



JAMES A. NELSON - STATE LIBRARIAN AND COMMISSIONER